

NITC Technical Panel Statewide Synchronous Video Work Group

Update and Round One Recommendations September 17, 2003 Michael Beach, Sponsor

Preliminary Round One Recommendations:

1. Recommend a State-level Internet Protocol (IP) network that maintains a satisfactory, user-defined Quality of Service for interactive distance learning, telemedicine, videoconferencing and data.
2. Recommend two contracts at the local level; one for procurement and maintenance of connective terminal hardware and another one for transport. One contract may be considered as long as the end-user has full access to and flexible use of all bandwidth on the network and has the ability to upgrade video equipment as desired.
3. If the authority does not already exist, recommend to the NITC that it work with the Public Service Commission to draft clarification language that allows providers to offer different service rates for public and private entities.
4. If the authority does not already exist, recommend to the NITC that it work with the Legislature to authorize a discounted rate for public entities for data services within flexibly provisioned bandwidth.
5. Recommend to the NITC that it work with the Legislature and the Public Service Commission to provide a one-time capital investment, compliant with NITC technical standards, for the replacement or upgrade of equipment at existing sites when current contracts expire or are re-negotiated.

Next Steps:

- Distribute first five recommendations to the SSVWG and ask for feedback and modifications by August 6, 2003 (Tom Rolfes).
- Present draft Round One recommendations to the NITC Technical Panel on August 13, 2003 (Mike Beach).
- Research current authority for recommendations #3 and #4 (Gene Hand).
- Begin cost estimations for recommendation #5 (John Horvath, Jeff McCartney)
- Complete survey on each distance learning network by September 30 (SSVWG members)
- Provide briefing to the Public Service Commission on the Statewide Synchronous Video Work Group on August 26, 2003 (Mike Beach, Gene Hand, Brenda Decker).
- Begin discussions with the telecommunication providers about an IP-centric network and flexibly provisioned bandwidth before the end of August 2003 (Steve Schafer, Mike Beach, Brenda Decker, Rick Golden, Gene Hand).
- Present final Round One recommendations to the NITC Technical Panel on September 17, 2003 (Mike Beach)
- Ask for approval of the Round One recommendations by the NITC on September 30, 2003 (Walter Weir).

The next meeting date and location of this work group has not been determined but it will be in early October. Previous Meetings: March 26, May 28, July 30, 2003.

September 16, 2003

Michael Beach, Chair
Nebraska Educational Telecommunications
P.O. Box 83111
Lincoln, NE 68501

Dear Mr. Beach:

The Commission is impressed with the progress reported by the State-wide Synchronous Video Network Work Group (SSVNWG) at our public meeting held August 26, 2003, to address the future of distance learning in Nebraska. We opened Docket No. C-2874/PI-71 in February of this year in response to concerns relative to distance learning and on March 18, 2003, a workshop was held at the Commission by videoconference with links to Columbus, Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney, McCook, North Platte, Norfolk, O'Neill, and Scottsbluff. Several parties provided information addressing several distance learning issues, and after the workshop concluded, it was clear that further technical collaboration was necessary to develop a comprehensive plan for the future. We believe the efforts of the SSVNWG have been significant and a plan for the future is beginning to take shape.

There were two issues identified during the SSVNWG report on which the group sought guidance from the Commission. The two issues were: 1) how the future service would be tariffed, and 2) what options were available to fund the conversion to an Internet Protocol (IP) centric network.

Regarding the first issue, there appear to be several options at this time with respect to how the network would be structured including what equipment would be provided by the carriers. We believe there actually may be options for the schools, based on their ability to pay for equipment up front, that would result in several different service offerings and the resulting tariffs. A thorough analysis that considers the available support from the School and Library Division (SLD) of the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) should be conducted for both the equipment and transport necessary to support the network prior to selecting the appropriate service from the selected carrier. Tariff issues relative to distance learning can be resolved once the parameters for the service are defined.

Michael Beach
Page 2
September 16, 2003

The second issue is how to fund, over a 3-5 year period, the conversion to an IP network estimated to cost \$10 million above the current rates charged to the participating schools. There were suggestions that the Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF) provide support for deploying this new education network. The Commission is currently conducting significant reform of the support to high cost rural areas. At the same time, we are committed to implementing a telehealth network with annual support from the fund. The uncertainty of the future demands on the fund for these supported services prevents us from considering further commitments at this time.

We understand the importance of moving forward and addressing the associated funding requirement. Therefore, we recommend that a work group be assembled to address the funding issue. Once the Nebraska Information Technology Commission (NITC) has formally adopted the SSVNWG recommendations, the work group should be prepared to investigate funding sources such as RUS grants, federal USF support from the SLD, philanthropic foundations and/or state funding provided by the legislature.

We remain concerned about the future of distance learning in Nebraska and are encouraged by your report, which recommends a state-level IP network be developed. As such, we stand ready and willing to participate on the funding work group.

Sincerely,

Anne C. Boyle, Chair

Gerald L. Vap, Vice-Chair

Lowell C. Johnson

Rod Johnson

Frank E. Landis

cc: Brenda Decker, DOC
Tom Rolfes, NITC
Wayne Fisher, DOE